

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

Tobi Brown, individually and on behalf of all others
similarly situated;

Plaintiff,

-v.-

Portfolio Recovery Associates, LLC
and John Does 1-25.

Defendant(s).

Civil Action No:

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff Tobi Brown, (hereinafter, “Plaintiff”), a New York resident, brings this Class Action Complaint by and through her attorneys, Stein Saks, PLLC, against Defendant Portfolio Recovery Associates, LLC (hereinafter, “Defendant PRA”), individually and on behalf of a class of all others similarly situated, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, based upon information and belief of Plaintiff’s counsel, except for allegations specifically pertaining to Plaintiff, which are based upon Plaintiff’s personal knowledge.

INTRODUCTION/PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. Congress enacted the FDCPA in 1977 in response to the “abundant evidence of the use of abusive, deceptive, and unfair debt collection practices by many debt collectors.” 15 U.S.C. §1692(a). At that time, Congress was concerned that “abusive debt collection practices contribute to the number of personal bankruptcies, to material instability, to the loss of jobs, and to invasions of individual privacy.” *Id.* Congress concluded that “existing laws...[we]re

inadequate to protect consumers,” and that ““the effective collection of debts’ does not require ‘misrepresentation or other abusive debt collection practices.’” 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(b) & (c).

2. Congress explained that the purpose of the Act was not only to eliminate abusive debt collection practices, but also to “insure that those debt collectors who refrain from using abusive debt collection practices are not competitively disadvantaged.” Id. § 1692(e). After determining that the existing consumer protection laws “were inadequate” Id §1692(b), Congress gave consumers a private cause of action against debt collectors who fail to comply with the Act. Id. § 1692k.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331, 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et. seq. and 28 U.S.C. § 2201. If applicable, the Court also has pendant jurisdiction over the State law claims in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).

4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2).

NATURE OF THE ACTION

5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of New York consumers under §1692 *et seq.* of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act (“FDCPA”), and

6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory and injunctive relief.

PARTIES

7. Plaintiff is a resident of the State of New York, County of Nassau, residing at 554 Saddle Ridge Rd., Woodmere, NY 11598.

8. Defendant PRA is a "debt collector" as the phrase is defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6) and used in the FDCPA with an address for service c/o their registered agent Corporation Service Company 80 State Street, Albany, NY 12207-2543.

9. Upon information and belief, Defendant PRA is a company that uses the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engages in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due another.

10. John Does 1-25, are fictitious names of individuals and businesses alleged for the purpose of substituting names of Defendants whose identities will be disclosed in discovery and should be made parties to this action.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

11. Plaintiffs bring this claim on behalf of the following case, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3).

12. The Class consists of:

- a. all individuals with addresses in the State of New York;
- b. to whom Defendant PRA sent a collection letter attempting to collect a consumer debt;
- c. that included materially misleading and deceptive language regarding a request to the three major crediting agencies regarding deletion of tradeline upon final payment;
- d. which letter was sent was filed on or after a date one (1) year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date twenty-one (21) days after the filing of this action.

13. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendant and those companies and entities on whose behalf they attempt to collect and/or have purchased debts.

14. Excluded from the Plaintiff Classes are the Defendants and all officer, members, partners, managers, directors and employees of the Defendants and their respective immediate families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action, and all members of their immediate families.

15. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Classes, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, **in the form attached as Exhibit A**, violate 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e and 1692f.

16. The Plaintiffs' claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories. The Plaintiffs will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Classes defined in this complaint. The Plaintiffs have retained counsel with experience in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiffs nor her attorneys have any interests, which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.

17. This action has been brought, and may properly be maintained, as a class action pursuant to the provisions of Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure because there is a well-defined community interest in the litigation:

- a. **Numerosity:** The Plaintiffs are informed and believe, and on that basis allege, that the Plaintiff Classes defined above are so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.

- b. **Common Questions Predominate:** Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Classes and those questions predominate over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, **in the forms attached as Exhibit A** violate 15 U.S.C. § 1692e and §1692f.
- c. **Typicality:** The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the class members. The Plaintiffs and all members of the Plaintiff Classes have claims arising out of the Defendant's common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.
- d. **Adequacy:** The Plaintiffs will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiffs have no interests that are adverse to the absent class members. The Plaintiffs are committed to vigorously litigating this matter. Plaintiffs have also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiffs nor her counsel have any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue the instant class action lawsuit.
- e. **Superiority:** A class action is superior to the other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy because individual joinder of all members would be impracticable. Class action treatment will permit a large number of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single forum efficiently and without unnecessary duplication of effort and expense that individual actions would engender.

18. Certification of a class under Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure is also appropriate in that the questions of law and fact common to members of the Plaintiff

Classes predominate over any questions affecting an individual member, and a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy.

19. Depending on the outcome of further investigation and discovery, Plaintiffs may, at the time of class certification motion, seek to certify a class(es) only as to particular issues pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(4).

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

20. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs numbered above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

21. Some time prior to November 3, 2020, an obligation was allegedly incurred to Synchrony Bank.

22. The Synchrony Bank obligation arose out of a transaction in which money, property, insurance or services, which are the subject of the transaction, are primarily for personal, family or household purposes, specifically in regards to a TJX account.

23. The alleged Synchrony Bank obligation is a “debt” as defined by 15 U.S.C. §1692a(5).

24. Defendant PRA, a debt collector and the subsequent owner of the alleged Synchrony Bank, is collecting the alleged debt.

25. Defendant PRA collects and attempts to collect debts incurred or alleged to have been incurred for personal, family or household purposes on behalf of creditors using the United States Postal Services, telephone and internet.

Violation - November 3, 2020 Collection Letter

26. On or about November 3, 2020, Defendant PRA sent the Plaintiff an initial contact notice (the “Letter”) regarding the alleged debt owed to Synchrony Bank. **See Attached hereto as Exhibit A.**

27. The Letter states a balance of \$ 2,088.56.

28. The Letter offers two options regarding the balance: Either pay the full amount or choose a “savings plan” that allows the consumer to pay the balance for a discounted amount. For example, the letter offers the Plaintiff an option to pay the full balance in 1 payment of \$2,088.56 or a “savings plan” of 1 payment of \$1,775.28.

29. Below both offers, the Letter includes a sentence that states: “Within approximately 30 days of your final payment successfully posting, we will request that the three major credit reporting agencies delete our tradeline related to your account from your credit bureau report.”

30. The statement that Defendant will request deletion from the credit bureaus upon final payment is not qualified in any way and could imply that this deletion will take place in both scenarios; whether the balance is paid in full or paid for less than the full balance.

31. However, this statement could also easily be read to apply to only one of the offers.

32. For example, it would be reasonable for the least sophisticated consumer to believe that the offer of tradeline deletion would only apply to the offer to pay the balance in full, as an incentive to take that offer. Without that incentive, Defendant’s offer does not seem logical. Why choose to pay the full balance of \$2,088.56 when there is an offer to make a payment of \$1,775.28? The only answer would be that paying in full would receive the added benefit of tradeline deletion.

33. Defendant’s letter it is open to more than one reasonable interpretation, at least one of which is inaccurate

34. Plaintiff incurred an informational injury because the Defendants deceptively make an offer for tradeline deletion without properly qualifying and explaining the offer.

35. As a result of Defendant's deceptive, misleading and unfair debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.

COUNT I

VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT, 15 U.S.C. §1692e *et seq.*

36. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

37. Defendants' debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.

38. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692e, a debt collector may not use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.

39. Defendant violated §1692e :

- a. As the Letter it is open to more than one reasonable interpretation, at least one of which is inaccurate.
- b. By making a false and misleading representation in violation of §1692e(10).

40. By reason thereof, Defendants are liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendants' conduct violated Section 1692e et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT II

VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692f *et seq.*

41. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

42. Defendants' debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692f.

43. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692f, a debt collector may not use any unfair or unconscionable means in connection with the collection of any debt.

44. Defendants violated this section by omitting material information that gave Plaintiff a false understanding of the offer of tradeline deletion.

45. By reason thereof, Defendants are liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendants' conduct violated Section 1692f et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY

46. Pursuant to Rule 38 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff hereby requests a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Tobi Brown, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated demands judgment from Defendant PRA as follows:

1. Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and Raphael Deutsch, Esq. as Class Counsel;

2. Awarding Plaintiff injunctive relief by means of suspension of all debt collection activities related to the alleged debt by Defendants against Plaintiff while the instant litigation is pending;

3. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;

4. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;

5. Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;

6. Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and

7. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: Hackensack, New Jersey
November 18, 2020

/s/ Raphael Deutsch
By: Raphael Deutsch, Esq.
Stein Saks, PLLC
285 Passaic Street
Hackensack, NJ 07601
Phone: (201) 282-6500 ext. 201.
Attorneys For Plaintiff